

A Review Of Government Policies That Have An Impact On The Single Homeless

Naomi Parsons and Guy Palmer

October 2004



A Review Of Government Policies That Have An Impact On The Single Homeless

Contents

1. Summary	1
Work And Income	2
Education and Skills	3
Advice and Support	4
Housing	4
Health	5
2. Context.....	7
This Pamphlet	7
General Concerns Regarding Trends In The Single Homeless	8
3. Work	11
Links With Homelessness	11
Current Government Policy	11
Conclusions	13
4. Low Income	15
Links With Homelessness	15
Current Government Policy	15
Conclusions	16
5. Education And Skills	17
Links With Homelessness	17
Current Government Policy	17
Conclusions	19
6. Advice and Support	21
Links With Homelessness	21
Current Government Policy	21
Conclusions	22
7. Housing Benefit.....	23
Links With Homelessness	23
Current Government Policy	23
Conclusions	24
8. Affordable Rented Housing	27
Links With Homelessness	27
Current Government Policy	27
Conclusions	28
9. Health.....	30
Links With Homelessness	30
Current Government Policy	30
Conclusions	31
End Notes.....	33

1. SUMMARY

This paper is a review of Government policies that can potentially benefit single homeless people. It was commissioned by Crisis to inform their work on hidden homelessness and is the reference document for some of the recommendations made within the Crisis report: *'Hidden Homelessness: 17 Solutions'*, published in September 2004.

The intention has been to focus on policies outside of the ODPM Homeless and Supported Housing Directorate (HSHD), in response to the wide range of factors that cause and perpetuate homelessness, including lack of work and income, poor education and skills and poor health, as well as a lack of affordable housing.

The focus on single homelessness is in response to the fact most people who are homeless but not provided with permanent accommodation by their local authorities are single and that Government tends to view single homeless people as a lower priority than homeless families.

The table below provides an overview of the major relevant policies and our suggestions for the way forward. Each is briefly discussed in this summary, with more detail in the main text.

Subject area	Major relevant policies and initiatives	Suggested way forward
Work	Current New Deals	'A New Deal for the Homeless', whether this is an 'official' new type of New Deal or a transformation of the developing DWP strategy for the homeless.
	Progress to Work/Link Up	
	DWP strategy re homeless people	
Low income	Working Tax Credit	Making the eligibility criteria the same for single people as for families by removing the restrictions on hours worked and age.
Education and skills	No explicit policy	A project specifically to look at the problems of low education and skills among homeless people and to develop a policy response to address these problems.
Advice and support	Connexions	Develop a national framework for the provision of advice and support to those over 19, to complement the Connexion's framework already in place.
Housing Benefit	A variety of specific rules regarding eligibility and amount	Removing the single rent restriction for people under the age of 25.
		Modifying the rules regarding payment of benefit in arrears, benefit extensions, 16 hour study restriction, and non-dependent deductions.
Affordable rented housing	Housing Bill 2003 and Sustainable Communities Plan	Increasing social housing as a necessary part of any solution to meet the full scale of the problems of a shortage in affordable rented accommodation.
Health	Personalised Medical Services	To stimulate local developments, the major national voluntary organisations working with the homeless should put together some authoritative material on the health needs and how these best be met, for circulation to all Primary Care Trusts.
	National enhanced service for homeless people	
	Alternative Provider Medical Services	To stimulate local developments, the major national voluntary organisations working with the homeless should take a lead by raising awareness and developing guidelines to help voluntary organisations both initiate and run schemes.

The recommendations divide into three broad groups:

- Areas where Government needs policies which respond to the specific needs of homeless people: work; education and skills; and advice and support.
- Areas where current Government policy effectively discriminates against homeless people: low income; housing benefit; and affordable rented housing.
- Areas where the voluntary sector needs to be taking advantage of recent developments in Government policy: health.

WORK AND INCOME

A New Deal For Homeless People

Many homeless people do not have paid work including, for example, around 90% of people living in hostels. A common theme of much of the research into homelessness is that finding or retaining work is often critical both to preventing and to resolving homelessness. Clearly, one reason for this is the income that comes from paid work. But the experience of Crisis and others is that work also gives a person a sense of purpose and self-respect which can be at least as important. It follows that meaningful activity can often have a similar effect on homelessness as paid work.

Over the last few years, the Government has introduced a number of initiatives to help homeless people into work. The general question with these initiatives is whether they are sufficiently driven by the specific needs of homeless people rather than taking existing policies and focusing them on particular groups of homeless people. One example is the 'soft barriers' to work that many homeless people face, such as not having appropriate clothes to go to an interview, not being contactable by telephone and not having access to a computer to search for jobs or write applications. A second example is the experience of Crisis and others that, for many homeless people, paid work is not an immediate option as it is too far of a jump from the chaotic nature of their current lifestyles. What is needed is for the person to move through a series of steps, starting with activities that help with their emotional and personal problems, then moving onto activities which have a purpose and direction, and only then thinking about the skills and disciplines required for formal paid work.

Our overall conclusion is that what is required is 'a New Deal for the Homeless', whether this is an 'official' new type of New Deal or a transformation of the developing DWP strategy for the homeless.

Eligibility Rules for the Working Tax Credit

Although the proportion of homeless people who are working but on low pay is not known, it seems fair to assume that low pay is likely to be one of the major reasons why someone with a job has not been able to secure their own accommodation.

In April 2003, for the first time, the government introduced a tax credit which benefits adults without children as well as families. But, unlike families, adults without children have to both work at least 30 hours a week and be aged 25 or over to qualify. This is likely to mean that many single homeless working people do not qualify, given that many working homeless people may often only be working part-time and that homelessness disproportionately affects young people.

Our conclusion is that there would be substantial benefits to many single homeless people if the eligibility criteria for the WTC were made the same for single people as for families, namely by removing the restrictions relating to hours worked and age.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

An Overall Strategy for Homeless People

Research suggests levels of education and skills are generally much lower among homeless people than the rest of the population with, for example, major homeless organisations reporting that around half of their clients/members have no educational qualifications compared to one in twenty of the population as a whole. The experience of Crisis is that life skills are at least as important as formal educational qualifications.

There is currently no obvious overall Government policy for addressing low education and skills among homeless people. This contrasts with the situation for some other groups with similar poor standards, such as care leavers. It also contrasts with Government efforts to develop policies to help homeless people into work.

We conclude that the Government should initiate a project specifically to look at the problems of low education and skills among homeless people and to develop a policy response to address these problems.

As with policies relating to work, such a project would need to grapple with those aspects of the problem which are particular to homeless people. While there is a lack of firm evidence on precisely what these aspects are, the experience of Crisis and others suggests that they include:

- The need to find methods for engaging the people by making sure that any programmes are flexible to individual aspirations and needs and are based on the principle that individuals volunteer for particular parts of the programme.
- The experience that formal educational qualifications (e.g. GCSEs) will not be suitable for all homeless people and the consequent need for a wider value system, to encompass life skills and other activities that engage in learning.
- The need to tackle low education and skills among homeless people aged 20 and over as well as those aged up to 19.
- The need to engage with the more vulnerable end of homelessness as well as the less vulnerable end.

ADVICE AND SUPPORT

An Advice and Support Service for All Ages

It is widely agreed that advice and support are key to homelessness prevention. Current Government policy is that such advice and support is predominantly an issue for local authorities, who now have to carry out reviews and develop strategies aimed at preventing homelessness.

In practice, however, models of support vary around the country, depending on the approach adopted by the local authority. With the exception of Connexions for younger people, there is currently no national framework for such services.

We conclude that the Government should develop a similar framework for people over the age of 19, to complement the Connexion's framework already in place. This framework should incorporate the two essential characteristics of Connexions, namely access to services at single point of entry and levels of personal support tailored to needs.

HOUSING

Changes To Housing Benefit Rules

Clearly, the availability of Housing Benefit can make housing affordable to many people who could otherwise not afford to rent any accommodation. But both the rates of Housing Benefit, and its administrative rules, can also limit its value to some homeless people.

The Government currently appears to be open to the prospect of further Housing Benefit reform. Our conclusion is that organisations working with the homeless should take advantage of this opportunity to (once again) press the Government to ensure that the Housing Benefit system fully meets the needs of single homeless people and people who are at risk of homelessness.

Specific areas of current policy which are questionable from a homelessness perspective include:

- The single rent restriction, whereby those aged under 25 currently qualify for lower levels of Housing Benefit than those aged 25 and over.
- The restrictions of the recently introduced benefit run-on scheme to those who were previously claiming Income Support or JobSeeker's Allowance for at least six months and only if the job last for five weeks or more.
- The first Housing Benefit payment always being paid in arrears.
- The restriction that anyone over the age of 18 cannot claim Housing Benefit if they are studying for more than 16 hours a week.
- The policy whereby, when the child of a benefit claimant who lives with that claimant reaches the age of 18, the claimant suffers a reduction in the amount of Housing Benefit to which they are entitled.

Improving access and increasing supply of affordable rented housing

Clearly, single homeless people need somewhere to live and they usually cannot afford to buy, so the solution must lie with rented accommodation. But the total amount of social housing for rent continues to decline, with families tending to get priority for such housing, and the number of low income people in private rented accommodation is also decreasing.

The Government's overall policy response to the problems of housing shortage is centred on the building of new homes for sale, with its response to housing problems for homeless people being focussed on increasing the availability of private accommodation for rent.

In line with this general policy stance, a further possibility for increasing access to the private rented sector by single homeless people is the introduction of a national rent deposit scheme.

But perhaps the bigger question is whether the problems of a shortage of affordable housing for rent can ever really be resolved without an increase in the amount of social housing. Our analysis suggests that this is doubtful. We conclude the Government should review its existing suite of policies from the specific perspective of homelessness, either to demonstrate how they will be sufficient to address the problems of the shortage of suitable housing for homeless people or to complement existing policies with some additional initiatives relating to the supply of suitable social housing. Such a review would complement the recent Barker review by focussing on the particular needs of one group of the population, namely homeless people.

HEALTH

Stimulating local health services focussed on homeless people

Access to appropriate primary health care is an important concern for homeless people, who are known to suffer higher levels of mental and physical ill-health.

The government has recently introduced three initiatives (Personalised Medical Services, the National Enhanced Service, and Alternative Provider Medical Services) which aim to lessen health inequalities, including among the homeless. In each case, however, what actually happens on the ground will depend on the initiative of the local service providers, both within the NHS and in the voluntary sector. In other words, the new arrangements allow for – and indeed, encourage – the development of health services to meet the needs of homeless people but they guarantee neither the volume nor the quality of such provision.

To raise awareness of the health needs of homeless people among local NHS organisations, and thus to stimulate provision to meet these needs under the new arrangements, we suggest that the major national voluntary organisations working with the homeless should put together some authoritative material on the health needs and how these are best met, for circulation to all Primary Care Trusts.

The new Alternative Provider Medical Services (APMS) initiative provides an additional opportunity, namely for voluntary organisations working with the homeless to take direct action to ensure that their health needs are met. We suggest that the major national voluntary organisations working with the homeless should take a lead in this, raising awareness of the initiative amongst the voluntary sector and developing guidelines to help such organisations both initiate and run APMS schemes.

2. CONTEXT

THIS PAMPHLET

This paper is a review of Government policies that can potentially benefit single homeless people. It was commissioned by Crisis to inform their work on hidden homelessness, and is a reference document for some of the recommendations made within the Crisis report: *'Hidden Homelessness: 17 Solutions'*, published in September 2004.

It provides recommendations on the way forward for those areas of Government policy outside of the ODPM Homeless and Supported Housing Directorate (HSHD), and is based on an extensive review of the relevant policies in each Government Department.

There are obviously a number of areas within HSHD where there is potential for changes that could benefit single homeless people. For example, the homeless standard currently applicable to homeless families staying in bed-and-breakfast accommodation could be extended to single homeless people across all types of temporary accommodation. However, the purpose of this document is to focus on policies outside of the HSHD. This is in acknowledgement of the wide range of factors that cause and perpetuate homelessness, and also in recognition of that fact that, for the last few years at least, families and rough sleepers have been the main focus of the HSHD agenda.

The focus on single homelessness – or, more accurately, homeless people without dependent children - is in response to the fact most people who are homeless but not provided with permanent accommodation by their local authorities are single, that such numbers appear to be growing, and that Government tends to view single homeless people as a lower priority than homeless families.

The material is organised according to the causes or factors contributing to single homelessness. More specifically, there are sections on each of the following:

- Work.
- Low income.
- Education and skills.
- Advice and support.
- Housing benefit.
- Affordable rented housing.
- Health.

In each case, the material is organised under the following headings:

- Links with homelessness.
- Current Government policy.
- Our conclusions on the way forward.

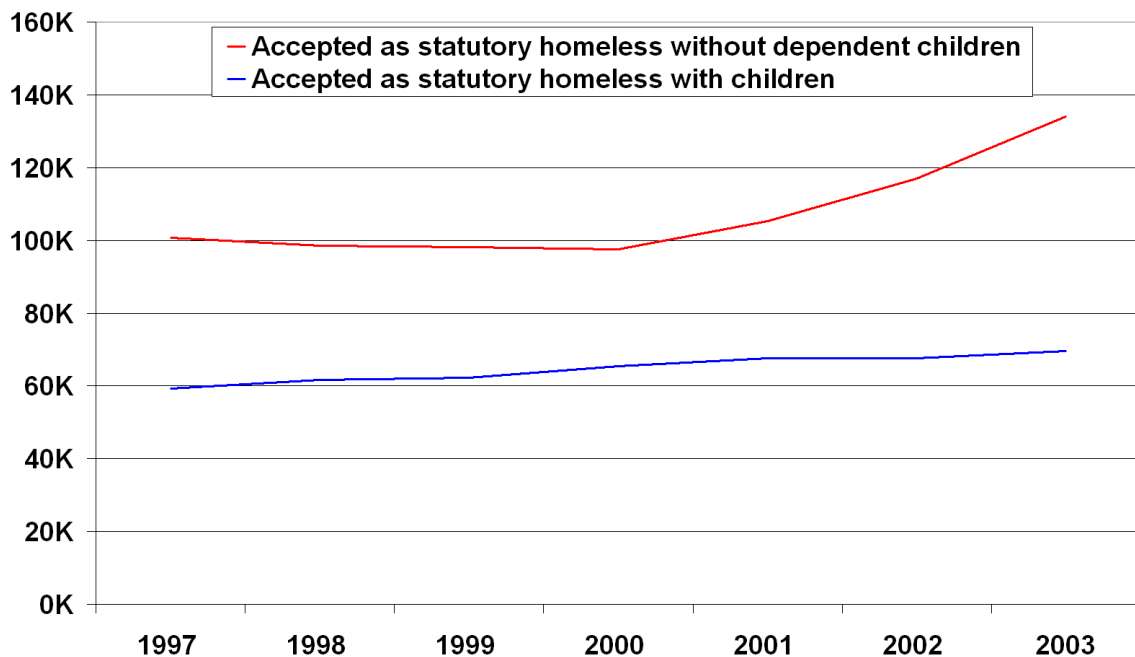
GENERAL CONCERNS REGARDING TRENDS IN THE SINGLE HOMELESS

Many single people accepted as statutorily homeless do not receive support from their local authority

If a family applies to their local authority to be accepted as statutorily homeless, and is accepted as such, then the local authority has a duty to provide them with suitable accommodation. In contrast, it has no such duty for homeless people without dependent children unless it also classifies them as 'vulnerable', for example if they are very young (aged 16 or 17), formerly in social services care, leaving an institution or faced with an actual threat of violence. In practice, this means that local authorities have a duty to provide accommodation to around half of the people without dependent children who they accept as being statutorily homeless, and has no such duty for the other half.¹

The numbers of single people accepted as statutorily homeless has risen in recent years

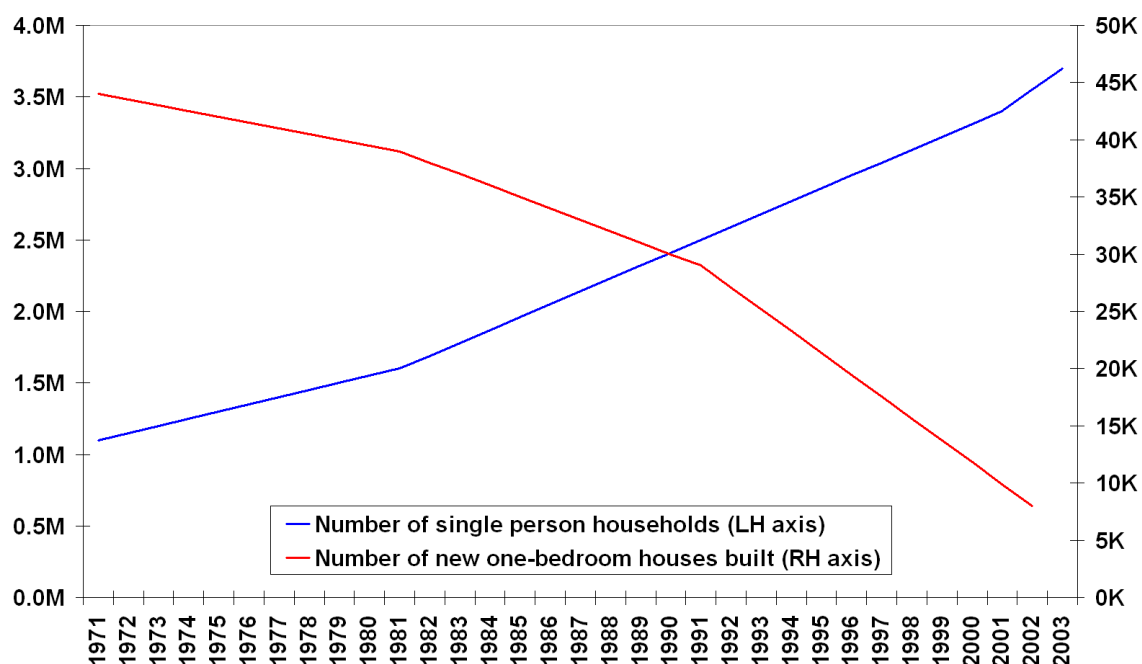
The number of households without dependent children who are accepted as statutorily homeless has been rising sharply in recent years, up by a third since 2000. As a result, two-thirds of those accepted as statutorily homeless in 2003 did not have dependent children.²



In practice, this implies that the vast majority of homeless households do not have dependent children. Because local authorities have no duty to provide accommodation to such people unless they are also classified as vulnerable, they have no clear incentive to apply to be classified as statutorily homeless and it seems reasonable to assume that many who would qualify therefore do not apply. Also, it seems likely that many of those who did successfully apply in previous years but were not provided with accommodation remain homeless in the following years.

There is a growing gap between the need for affordable housing for single people of working age and its availability.

The number of single person households of working age has grown rapidly and continually over the last 30 years, from 1.1 million in 1971 to 3.7 million in 2003.³ But, over the same period, the number of one-bedroom houses built each year has fallen rapidly and continually, from 44 thousand in 1971 to 8 thousand in 2003.⁴

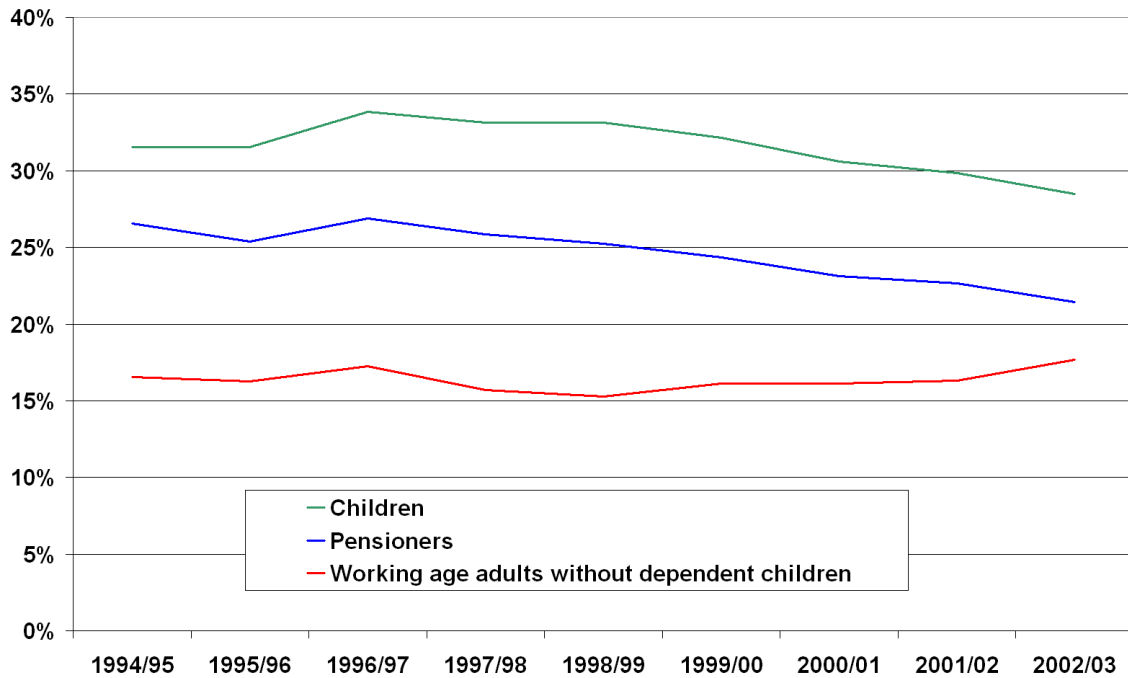


Furthermore, the total stock of social rented housing has been declining, from 6.6 million in 1981 to 5.1 million in 2002.⁵ And average house prices have been rising much faster than average earnings, having doubled since 1995 whereas average earnings have risen by a third.⁶

The contrast between the growth in the number of single person households of working age and the decline in the amount of affordable housing suitable for single people suggests a growing gap between the need for affordable housing for such people and its availability. Further evidence of this growing gap is provided by both the rapidly growing number of households in temporary accommodation (which has doubled since 1997)⁷ and the growing proportion of young adults still living with their parents (up from 50% in 1991 to 56% in 2003).⁸

Levels of income poverty among single working age people are, at best, steady

Working age adults without dependent children are the only group in the population where the levels of income poverty have not been falling in recent years.⁹



This is perhaps not surprising given that the current government has done a lot to help to alleviate income poverty among both families and pensioners (e.g. via increases in both out-of-work benefits and tax credits) but much less for working age adults without dependent children. The worry is that low income single working age people, of which single homeless people are a part, become (or already are) viewed as being ‘the undeserving poor’ who should look after themselves by finding a reasonably paid job.

3. WORK

LINKS WITH HOMELESSNESS

It is estimated that around 90% of people living in hostels do not have any paid work¹⁰ and a recent survey of homeless people in temporary accommodation came up with a similar proportion.¹¹ This compares to around 20% of the working age population as a whole. Clearly, therefore, living in hostels and not having paid work go hand in hand. It appears that this relationship is two-way: in some cases, lack of work is one of the triggers which has led to the person having to live in a hostel; in other cases, it is the hostel-living which has led to the lack of work.

A common theme of much of the research into homelessness is that reversing these dynamics is often critical both to preventing and to resolving homelessness.¹² Prevention is when finding or retaining paid work means that the person does not become homeless. Resolution is when finding paid work helps the person to move out of homelessness.

Clearly, the income from paid work can be a major factor in preventing or resolving homelessness in many cases. But the experience of Crisis and others is that work also gives a person a sense of purpose and self-respect which can be at least as important. In other words, meaningful activity can often have a similar effect on homelessness as paid work. The value of schemes that build up self-esteem as a stepping stone to employment has also been recognised by the ODPM.¹³ The material in this section is therefore concerned with work in the broadest sense, from paid employment to unpaid meaningful activity.

CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY

The three main relevant policies are:

- The New Deal.
- Pathways to Work/Link Up.
- The forthcoming DWP Homeless to Work Strategy.

The New Deal

The current New Deal offers counselling and guidance to job seekers, provision of education and training to the unskilled, and provision of work experience.

In April 2004, the New Deal was adapted to make it more suitable for homeless people. In particular, homeless people on the programme will now be identified and counted, directed to suitable provision (including meaningful occupation where appropriate) and will be monitored as they progress through to long term work.

However, eligibility is restricted to those who have been claiming JobSeekers' Allowance for at least 6 months consecutively (if aged 25 or under) or at least 18 months consecutively (if aged over 25). This may make it unsuitable for many homeless people whose itinerant and chaotic lifestyles often mean that there have been gaps in the claiming of benefits.

Progress to Work Link Up

‘Progress to Work’ (P2W) is a tailor-made employment support programme linked into Job Centre Plus programmes, which is designed specifically to help drug misusers back into work. P2W Link Up is the same programme, but expanded to cover others with support needs, including homeless people, ex-offenders, and alcohol misusers. The schemes are typically operated by specialist service providers (such as Turning Point) on behalf of Job Centre Plus.

The P2W initiative has a number of characteristics which are particularly relevant to homeless people, including a high level of support, an emphasis on an individual’s experience and aspirations, a degree of flexibility and provision of aftercare once in work.

Since the model has only just been introduced, it is too early to comment on whether or not it is working for homeless people. It is clear, however, that the current Government commitment is limited in terms of both its scale (it operates in 24 of the 90 Job Centre Plus Districts, aiming to help 1,750 people into work over two years) and its duration (currently only funded for the next two to three years). One concern here is whether the model will be able to establish itself fully over the three year period and thus demonstrate its value before the committed funding runs out.

The DWP Homeless to Work Strategy

The DWP Homeless to Work Strategy is currently being formulated, with the aim of finalising it later in 2004.

Because the strategy has not yet been written, it is obviously not possible to critique it. To be successful, however, the strategy will need to grapple with those aspects of lack of work which are of particular importance for homeless people. Examples which are not mentioned in the scoping paper produced by the DWP at the start of the project include:

- The ‘soft issues’ which often create a barrier to homeless people finding work. For example, a recent survey of 3,000 unemployed homeless people¹⁴ found that:
 - Three-fifths said they did not have appropriate clothes to go to an interview.
 - A quarter said that they had no use of a telephone.
 - A third said that they had nowhere to write an application for a job.
 - A third said they were unable to use a computer.
- Discrimination of potential employers on the basis of someone’s address being a hostel.¹⁵
- The particular problems of older homeless people trying to find work.¹⁶
- The value of meaningful activity as a stepping stone towards paid work.

A further concern relates to coverage. The original DWP scoping paper did not attempt to define homelessness but it is well known that homeless people live in a variety of circumstances, including temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation and sleeping on the floors of friends and family as well as hostels. The danger is that the DWP strategy limits itself to only some of these groups, for example, where the individuals are easiest to identify.

CONCLUSIONS

From the description of the initiatives above, it is clear that the government places a high priority on getting more people from disadvantaged groups into work and that it recognises homeless people as one of the groups who need help. We do, however, have a number of major concerns about the set of initiatives as a whole.

First, it is not clear that they will adequately address the particular barriers to work faced by homeless people. The ‘soft issues’ discussed earlier are one example. The New Deal restriction to people continually claiming JobSeekers’ Allowance for 6 months is another. But, more generally, there is currently a lack of authoritative research into what these barriers are and who they affect, a gap which may or may not be filled with the full results of the *Off the streets and into work* survey when they are published in November 2004. So, for example, the DWP strategy might be emasculated by the need to come to conclusions before sufficient evidence of the nature of the problems becomes available.

Second, it is not clear that the initiatives will cover all the major groups of homeless people, including those living in hostels, temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation and sleeping on the floors of friends and family. Rather, the risk is that they are restricted to people who are already part of existing Government initiatives to help people into work and who happen to be homeless.

Third and finally, all the initiatives seem to focus exclusively on paid work itself whereas - as discussed earlier - meaningful activity not directly related to finding paid work can often be beneficial for homeless people and can often be a necessary first step in a longer road towards paid work.

Our conclusion is that Government policy development towards helping homeless people into work needs to start from the perspective of the homeless people themselves rather than by taking existing policies and focusing them on particular groups of homeless people. In other words, ***what is required is ‘a New Deal for the Homeless’, whether this is an ‘official’ new type of New Deal or a more ambitious transformation of the developing DWP strategy for the homeless.*** In this context, it is noteworthy that ‘The Big Conversation’¹⁷ asks, in the context of reaching full employment, whether the New Deal should give priority to certain groups. If so, single homeless people would appear to have a good case for inclusion.

Furthermore, if the development of this New Deal requires more evidence of the specific problems homeless people face in obtaining paid work, then it should include the collection of such evidence rather than being developed in its absence or deferred because of the lack of this evidence.

An example of how this recommendation might change the direction of Government policy is the Crisis Skylight programme. This programme, effectively being piloted in London, is based on the view that, for many homeless people, paid work is not an immediate option as it is too far of a jump from the chaotic nature of their current lifestyles. Rather, what is required is for the person to move through a series of steps, starting with activities that help with their emotional and personal problems, then moving onto activities which have a purpose and direction, and only then thinking about the skills and disciplines required for formal paid work. In response, the Skylight programme covers a wide range of activities, from painting and yoga, through bicycle repair and IT courses, to a café which is run by Skylight members.

4. LOW INCOME

LINKS WITH HOMELESSNESS

Higher income for homeless people will not necessarily result in accommodation, since homelessness is seldom caused by one factor alone. But it seems reasonable to assume that it increases the chances of someone being able to obtain accommodation.

In particular, higher income may be the key to preventing or solving homelessness problems for many of those who are less vulnerable, where economic circumstance rather than, say, substance misuse or poor mental health, is the primary cause of the homelessness. A key group here is people who are working but in low pay.

CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY

Since the Labour Government came into power in 1997, it has introduced a number of major policy initiatives to boost the incomes of families with children: their out-of-work benefits (Income Support, etc) have risen by 20-30% more than inflation and their in-work benefits (tax credits) have been substantially boosted both in terms of the amounts of money a family receives and the numbers of families who are eligible.

In contrast, adults without dependent children have fared much worse: their out-of-work benefits have been limited to inflation-only rises and, until recently, none of them were eligible for tax credits. The contrast in the fortunes of low income families with and without children has recently been highlighted in the latest government poverty figures: whereas the number of families in income poverty fell by 5% in the year to April 2003, the number of adults without children in income poverty rose by 10%.¹⁸

The main exceptions to the Government's focus on families are the National Minimum Wage (NMW) - which applies to everyone - and the Working Tax Credit (WTC) introduced in April 2003 - which is the first tax credit which people in work but without children can apply for. According to figures released in January 2004, there were 190,000 claimants of tax credits without children who were getting WTC¹⁹.

Clearly, if either the NMW or WTC were raised, this would help boost the earnings of single homeless people who are doing some low paid work. Such possibilities are not discussed further in this pamphlet on the grounds that they are part of a much bigger debate about low pay rather than being specifically about homelessness.

There are, however, a number of characteristics about the current WTC arrangements which potentially discriminate against some single homeless people. In particular, to qualify, a single person must be working at least 30 hours per week and must be aged 25 or over, although neither of these restrictions apply to people with children. Anecdotally, many single homeless people work only work part-time and would thus not qualify. And it is well known that homelessness disproportionately affects young people.²⁰

CONCLUSIONS

The WTC represents the first substantial Government policy to help those without dependent children whilst they are working.²¹ It is an acknowledgement that low income among working people without dependent children is a problem. The current restrictions, however, mean that it is not yet a full solution for either younger single people or single people working part-time.

The lack of any substantive data on the characteristics of low paid people means that it is not possible to quantify how many single homeless people these restrictions currently affect.²² But the observations above - that many working homeless people may often only be working part-time and that homelessness disproportionately affects young people – suggest that the numbers might be considerable.

The obvious conclusion is that ***there would be substantial benefits to many single homeless people if the eligibility criteria for the WTC were made the same for single people as for families, namely by removing the restrictions relating to hours worked and age.***

Given that WTC is a new policy, it may well be that the Government will consider further changes to it over time, as it did with the family equivalent (Working Families Tax Credit) after the first few years. Indeed, the Inland Revenue has indicated that possible modifications and extensions will be considered once the system has bedded in.

5. EDUCATION AND SKILLS

LINKS WITH HOMELESSNESS

Reports by organisations working with homeless people suggest that levels of education and skills are much generally much lower amongst their clients/members than for the population as a whole. One estimate is that is that only a quarter have reached Level Two²³ compared to the national average of two-thirds²⁴. Other estimates are that around half of homeless young people have no qualifications, compared to 5% of the population as a whole.²⁵

In most cases, poor educational attainment will not be the cause of homelessness. Clearly, however, educational qualifications can help both self-esteem and increase prospects of finding work and can thus help both to prevent and resolve homelessness.

The experience of Crisis is that life skills are at least as important as formal educational qualifications. The material in this section is therefore concerned with education and skills in the broadest sense.

CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY

The only area of Government policy relating to education and skills that specifically tries to address homeless people is Connexions, which focuses on young people aged 13-19. The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) has no obvious policies on the subject, although its skills strategy arguably implicitly does - or at least, could - encompass both education/skills and homeless people. Finally, a number of the initiatives of the Homeless and Supported Housing Directorate (HSHD) of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) cover aspects of education/skills. In this context, the following areas of Government policy are discussed below:

- Connexions.
- The DfES skills strategy, 2003.
- Learn Direct.
- Local authority homelessness strategies.
- Replacement Learning Zones.

Connexions

When Connexions was set up, it was done with an eye to having an impact on youth homelessness, since “education, training and employment [the primary principles of inclusion as far as Connexions is concerned] are among the main factors protecting against homelessness”²⁶.

Connexions offers support in accordance with the housing needs of the young person through a combination of one-to-one support, and brokerage of appropriate specialist services:

- If someone is at risk of homelessness, Connexions personal advisers help address the source of the risk. In practice, this might require advisers to link people to family mediation services, or substance misuse services, depending on the source of risk.

- If a young person is leaving home, advisers offer help accessing accommodation, benefits, life skills and anything else that might prevent homelessness.
- If a young person is already homeless, advisers work with the appropriate agencies to help secure accommodation and, once this has been done, agree protocols with the housing provider to “update them about the young person’s situation... and work with them to agree an action plan and roles”.²⁷ The plans aim to help the young person settle in accommodation, or help them to return home, with the aim of enabling them to successfully engage in learning.

One limitation of Connexions is that it caters primarily for people up to the age of 19. Job Centre Plus is the nearest equivalent for people over the age of 19, but, apart from the aim of getting people into education, employment or training, the services differ significantly. For example, Job Centre Plus does not operate a system of personal advisers linked in to other services in a structured, formalised way - something which is a perceived strength of Connexions.

A second limitation is that Connexions is not thought to engage the most vulnerable, hard to reach young adults, instead tending to engage those that are already in the system. Because the help that is provided is not very intensive, it requires a considerable degree of motivation and commitment on the part of the service users to gain value from it, making it unsuitable for the most vulnerable.

Skills Strategy 2003

The skills strategy launched in 2003, *21st Century Skills – Realising Our Potential*, talks in very general terms about helping ‘disadvantaged groups’ to improve their skills. Homeless people are not mentioned specifically, and there is little indication that the proposed methods for tackling skills disadvantage have taken specific account of homeless people.

Skills for Life, the precursor of the Skills Strategy, identified homeless people as a group in particular need of skills development, but the definition of homelessness used only covers those who are statutory homeless,²⁸ which, at least for homeless people without dependent children, is only a minority.

Learn Direct

Learn Direct is an initiative developed by the University for Industry, and is funded by the Learning and Skills Council which comprises around 2000 access and advice centres around the UK. It provides information on courses available in a specific area, and offers learning courses on line. The aim is to provide a flexible way of learning with no rigid commitment necessary. The courses are potentially accessible to homeless people, since all that is needed to register is an email address.

Although not a specific policy to address homelessness, its target groups are those “who are excluded from education”, “who feel excluded from our digital society”, and who are “seeking work and wish to improve employability”, all groups which will obviously include some homeless people.

The actual engagement of homeless people with Learn Direct is not known. However, it would appear that use is not widespread, since Learn Direct has recently undertaken work to better understand how homeless people might be engaged.²⁹ Learn Direct have stated that homeless people are a group of particular interest for them, and are keen to extend their work beyond Foyers.

Homelessness Strategies

A HSHD Policy Briefing on Employment in June 2003 states that local authority homelessness strategies are the main and most effective way in which training and employment opportunities can be improved for homeless people.

It does, however, provide little guidance on what the strategies should say on this subject - help is limited to a list of organisations and government schemes that may be of use. This is in sharp contrast with housing issues, where substantial guidance is provided. Training and education is also portrayed as an optional part of the strategy - a "local authority may want to ensure that people who are homeless have access to the services they need e.g. education."³⁰

Replacement Learning Zones

At present, the HSHD is working with the National Learning and Skills Council on a replacement to the Learning Zones, which ended in March 2002.³¹ Little is known about the replacement except that the aims are: to train staff and volunteers working in the homelessness sector in order to enhance learning for clients; to develop a programme for homeless clients; and to map provision.

CONCLUSIONS

Whilst the lead Government department responsible for work (DWP) is clearly trying to grapple with the issues relating to homeless people, it is much less clear that the lead Government department responsible for education and skills (DfES) is trying to do the same. The net result is that there is currently no obvious Government policy for addressing low education and skills among homeless people. This situation is in contrast with that for care leavers, who have similarly poor standards³² but where there are explicit policies in place to improve these standards.³³ ***We therefore suggest that the Government should initiate a project specifically to look at the problems of low education and skills among homeless people and to develop a policy response to address these problems.***

Issues that such a project would need to grapple with include:

- The apparent lack of any authoritative research on the longitudinal effect of learning and skills programmes among homeless people. The only evidence that we are aware of is that emerging from the Crisis Skylight initiative which suggests that, to engage people, any programme of action needs to be flexible to individual aspirations and needs, to have clear goals (not necessarily related to traditional examination qualifications), and to be based on the principle that individuals volunteer for particular parts of the programme.
- The probability that formal educational qualifications (e.g. GCSEs) may not be suitable for all homeless people and the consequent need for a wider value system, to encompass life skills (which are difficult to measure) and to value other qualifications/activities that help homeless people to engage in learning in some way.
- The need to tackle low education and skills among homeless people aged 20 and over as well as those aged up to 19, and thus to provide an integrated policy response for all ages.
- The need to engage with the more vulnerable end of homelessness as well as the less vulnerable end. This will require a policy response which reaches out to both find and engage such people.

6. ADVICE AND SUPPORT

LINKS WITH HOMELESSNESS

It is widely agreed that advice and support are key to homelessness prevention, particularly given the increasing emphasis on the ‘personal’ factors that cause homelessness. For example, the Government’s homeless strategy, *More than a roof*, states that “it is absolutely vital that organisations promote information, advice and mediation services.... Getting the right help at the right time can sometimes prevent homelessness completely or ensure that someone’s experience of homelessness is less costly, both in human and financial terms”.³⁴

CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY

Advice and support is viewed as predominantly an issue for local authorities. Following the Homelessness Act 2002, local authorities have had to carry out reviews and develop strategies aimed at preventing homelessness. The legislation states that “advice and assistance will need to be up-to date and robust if it is to be effective and help achieve the housing authorities’ strategic aim of preventing homeless”.³⁵

It also states that “the service will need to be wide ranging so that it offers advice not only on housing options, but also on the broad range of factors that can contribute to homelessness”.³⁶ This might include, for example, advice on social security benefits, household budgeting, tenancy support services, and family mediation services.

More than a roof highlights the value of the ‘one stop shops’, a model of service provision that provides a holistic approach to homelessness, providing “benefits, employment advice, access to rent deposit schemes, help to return home, family mediation, links to health and social services etc”.³⁷ A focus on the complex personal problems of the person is crucial to preventing homelessness successfully, as lessons from tackling rough sleeping have showed.

HSHD also spreads ‘good practice’ about advice and assistance, and supports some prevention schemes with funding.³⁸

In practice, however, models of support vary around the country, depending on the approach adopted by the local authority. Whilst some local authorities offer clients substantial and holistic provision, others only provide a list of accommodation possibilities in the area. Many authorities will be somewhere between these two extremes. While standards of provision vary greatly, there is no data about the services on offer nor the standards to which they must adhere. Rather, the guidance for local authorities simply states that they “may wish to refer to the quality assurance systems applied by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Shelter network of housing advice centres”.³⁹

The one area where there may be greater consistency of provision is for younger people, as provided through Connexions. Although the primary motivation behind Connexions is getting young people back into learning, it also provides advice and support across a wide range of areas including housing advice, family mediation, and drug and alcohol services. Clients may be allocated a personal adviser within Connexions in cases where the support needs of the person are identified as high, or they may be put in touch with specialist adviser in their area of need, to negotiate service provision and provide advice. Either way, Connexions provides access to a wide range of advice and support services which are available at a single point of entry.

A recent GLA evaluation of youth homelessness prevention initiatives found that young homeless people most value services when advice on a range of issues is available in a single place.⁴⁰ As *More than a roof* indicates, there is no reason to assume that the preferences of adults would be substantially different.

As discussed in the previous section on Education and Skills, however, there are issues with Connexions. A recent evaluation notes that standards do vary, depending on the success of the partnership.⁴¹ Other criticisms include its inability to engage with the most vulnerable, either because they do not approach Connexions or because it does not offer high levels of support when they do approach Connexions.

CONCLUSIONS

Advice and support has a key role to play in both homelessness prevention and in helping people out of homelessness. But - with the exception of Connexions for younger people - there is currently no national framework for such services. ***We suggest that the Government develops such a framework for people over the age of 19, to complement the Connexion's framework already in place.*** This framework should incorporate the two essential characteristics of Connexions, namely access to services at single point of entry and levels of personal support tailored to needs.

Another way of helping to ensure consistent high quality advice and support across the country would be to introduce a national standard to which local authorities have to adhere, as they do in Scotland.⁴²

7. HOUSING BENEFIT

LINKS WITH HOMELESSNESS

Clearly, the availability of Housing Benefit can make housing affordable to many people who could otherwise not afford to rent any accommodation. But both the rates of Housing Benefit, and its administrative rules, can also limit its value to some homeless people. For example, as discussed below, current arrangements can restrict access to private rented sector for young people, can cause someone to leave home before they are ready, can act as a disincentive to work and can impede efforts to improve educational qualifications.

CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY

The 'Single Room Rent' Restriction (SRR)

It has been estimated that, on average, private sector tenants in receipt of Housing Benefit currently face a gap of around £20 per week between their benefit entitlement and their rent.⁴³ Research suggests that, as well as causing financial difficulties for those in receipt of Housing Benefit, it also causes shortages in the amount of housing available for them as landlords are reluctant to rent to them.⁴⁴

For single people under the age of 25, the potential problems are more severe. This is because the maximum amount of Housing Benefit that they are entitled to is restricted to the average cost of renting a room in a shared flat (the 'Single Room Rent' Restriction). The new Local Housing Allowance, currently being piloted and due to be rolled out in 2005, has maintained this restriction.

Since the 'Single Room Rent' Restriction was introduced, the number of young people in deregulated private rented accommodation has fallen by three-quarters, from 114,000 in 1996 to 31,000 in 2000.⁴⁵

Housing Benefit Rules

Four particular rules that impact on single homeless people are considered here:

- **Benefit extensions.** Until recently, Housing Benefit ceased for all people as soon as they started work. This can obviously be a disincentive to seeking work, as the person may feel that taking on a job is too risky for their short-term finances. To increase certainty, the Government has recently introduced a new four week benefit run-on, but only for claimants who have been in receipt of Income Support or JobSeeker's Allowance for at least 6 months and only if the job lasts for five weeks or more. The six month rule means that these benefit extensions will exclude those moving in and out of work, those making a few failed attempts before finding a job they like, and those that simply have not been consistently claiming for 6 months - a substantial proportion of job seekers.⁴⁶ The five week rule deters those from trying out jobs when they are unsure how they will work out, or from trying paid work experience for or a couple of weeks.⁴⁷ Both of these rules seem likely to act as a disincentive for homeless people to find work.

- **Payment in arrears.** Payment of Housing Benefit is always at least four weeks in arrears. In practice, it is often much longer and the delays are increasing: between 1995/6 and 2000/01, the proportion of new claims taking more than 14 days doubled from 18% to 37%.⁴⁸ Furthermore, local authorities do not have to stipulate when the payment will be available at the start of a new claim. The potential impact on homeless people is to make it more difficult for them to find accommodation, partly because of the financial difficulties of surviving the period until the Housing Benefit arrives, and partly because of the disincentive for landlords to rent to them.
- **The 16-hour rule.** The 16-hour rule means that anyone over the age of 18 cannot claim Housing Benefit if they are studying for more than 16 hours a week. In practice, this means that many low skilled homeless young people are likely to be abandoning attempts to gain qualifications at Level 2 and 3, and instead move into work that does not require qualifications or skills.⁴⁹ For example, The Foyer Federation estimates that over half its residents have no qualifications but that around two-fifths of these are deterred from studying because they will lose their benefit entitlement.
- **Non-dependent deductions.** The non-dependent deduction means that, when the child of a benefit claimant who lives with that claimant reaches the age of 18, the claimant suffers a reduction in the amount of Housing Benefit to which they are entitled. This has been known to force young people to leave home, which in turn can directly cause homelessness and/or lead to another claim for Housing Benefit, which more than wipes out the savings from the non-dependent deduction.⁵⁰ It is also known to act as a disincentive to work. Non-dependent deductions are set at a flat rate for any dependents who are not working, or working less than 16 hours. But for those working over 16 hours, a sliding scale is introduced based on earnings. In these cases, the amount owed by the dependent to the primary claimant due to the deduction is high enough to act as disincentive to work.⁵¹

CONCLUSIONS

Although Housing Benefit reform has been on the agenda of many organisations working with the homeless for many years, it is often given a low priority in their campaigning. In part, this may be because it is a technical subject, where it is difficult to come up with headline-grabbing recommendations. However, while this makes it more difficult to create a groundswell of opinion in favour of reform, it does not make the subject any less important and, indeed, our feeling is that changes to the detailed rules of Housing Benefit could have a major favourable impact on single homelessness.

Furthermore, it appears that the Government is open to the prospect of further reform. Reform of private sector Housing Benefit was highlighted in the 2001 Labour manifesto and, since then, the Government has taken a number of steps to simplify the Housing Benefit system and to improve its administration.⁵² The need for further reform is also suggested in Labour's current 'Big Conversation'⁵³ which asks "what can we do to simplify Housing Benefit and extend choice to tenants in both the private and rented sector?"

Our overall conclusion is that *organisations working with the homeless should take advantage of this opportunity to (once again) press the government to ensure that the Housing Benefit system fully meets the needs of single homeless people and people who are at risk of homelessness.*

In this context, we have a number of specific policy recommendations of specific relevance to single homeless people, as set out below.

The New Local Housing Allowances Should Not Include A Single Rent Restriction

It is generally agreed that levels of Housing Benefit should reflect the market rents of reasonable accommodation. We are not aware of any authoritative research into the adequacy or otherwise of the levels of Housing Benefit for those aged under 25 who come under the 'Single Room Rent' Restriction. But the evidence of the general shortfalls in Housing Benefit combined with the dramatic fall in the number of young people in deregulated private rented accommodation since the introduction of the 'Single Room Rent' Restriction suggests that there is currently a major problem, particularly in areas of high housing demand.

The imminent introduction of Local Housing Allowances - to be rolled out nationally in 2005 - will perpetuate this problem as their current formulation envisages a lower allowance for single people aged under 25. But the introduction of this new system also provides an obvious opportunity for addressing the problem, by simply removing the two-tier system before the nationwide rollout.

In 2000, Shelter estimated the cost of abolition to be around £25 million per year.⁵⁴

The Recently Introduced Benefit Extensions Should Be Widened

By introducing the benefit run-on scheme, the Government recognised that the current system can act as a disincentive to work. While this may help those who have been unemployed for a long time and are seeking permanent employment, it is much less clear to us that it fully addresses the needs of people who have in gaps in their claims for out-of-work benefits nor the needs of those who are seeking casual work - both patterns being common among homeless people. We therefore suggest that the benefit extensions are further widened both to cover those starting work who have been on Income Support or JobSeeker's Allowance for four weeks (rather than six months, as currently) and to remove the five week minimum job duration condition.

The Pivot Initiative estimates the cost of such changes would be around £25 million per year.⁵⁵

The First Housing Benefit Payment Should – At Least In Part - Be Paid In Advance

Instead of Housing Benefit payments always being made in arrears, with particular uncertainty about the timing of the first payment, this first payment could be paid in advance, or part in advance and part in arrears. Some local authorities already operate in such a way.⁵⁶ In addition to improving access, research suggests that this would simplify Housing Benefit administration, improve security for landlord and tenant, and help prevent people getting into debt.⁵⁷

The 16-Hour Rule Should Be Abolished

One of the government stated objectives is to improve access to further education to disadvantaged groups. But, with many homeless people lacking qualifications, and with many of these deterred from studying because they will lose their entitlement to benefit, it is clear that the current 16-hour rule is pushing people in the opposite direction.

It has been estimated that removing the 16-hour rule would increase the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in higher education by around 9%⁵⁸.

Current Non-Dependent Deductions Should Be Reviewed

The basic rationale for non-dependent deductions is to save Government money. But if its effect is to put pressure on young people to leave home and either claim Housing Benefit elsewhere or to become homeless, then its effect might be precisely the opposite. This alone should be reason enough to review current arrangements. When combined with the resulting disincentive to work, plus the additional pressure on an already stretched housing market, the case for review becomes overwhelming. The obvious options here to abolish the non-dependent deduction altogether, or to introduce a flat rate, acknowledging that working non-dependants should be expected to contribute something towards housing costs.

8. AFFORDABLE RENTED HOUSING

LINKS WITH HOMELESSNESS

Single homeless people need somewhere to live and they usually cannot afford to buy, so the solution must lie with rented accommodation.

But the total amount of social housing for rent is decreasing at a rate of around 40,000 per year (1997-2002)⁵⁹ and families tend to get priority for such housing. And the total number of low income and economically inactive people in private rented accommodation is also decreasing, by at least 10,000 homes per year.⁶⁰ So, it would seem that single homeless people have an ever decreasing chance of securing somewhere to live. Many are therefore forced to stay with friends and family, or remain in hostel/specialist provision for long periods of time, as there is nowhere else for them to go.⁶¹ All of this is happening alongside a government policy that is centred on the promotion of home ownership rather than rented accommodation.

CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY

The two main current government policies relating to affordable rented housing are:

- The Housing Bill 2003.
- The Sustainable Communities Plan.⁶²

Housing Bill 2003

One of the stated aims of the Housing Bill is to improve access to the private rented sector. It plans to achieve this through the mandatory licensing of Houses of Multiple Occupation and private licensing of private landlords, on the grounds that such licensing will make renting a more attractive option for potential landlords. However, the licensing will only apply in low demand areas and thus, even if successful, will have only a limited impact on single homeless people given that many of them are homeless in high demand areas.

The Bill also aims to increase the supply of affordable housing by extending the right to build affordable homes to companies that are not registered social landlords (RSLs).⁶³ However, no indication is given as to how much of an impact these policies will make, or whether these homes will be for sale or for rent - an important question in the context of housing homeless people.

An amendment to the Bill was announced May 2004, making a provision for Empty Homes Management Orders. These will allow the council to act as owners, if a property has been empty for a long period of time and its owners have turned down voluntary offers of help to make it useful again. Such a provision will presumably increase the number of homes available for rent, although the extent to which this would impact on single homelessness will depend on where these homes are available, and whether they are rented at 'affordable' levels.

Sustainable Communities Plan

The Sustainable Communities Plan aims to create more affordable homes by ensuring that housing planning targets are met, that development goes ahead in the four key development areas⁶⁴, and by allocating £5 billion from 2004 to 2006 for affordable homes. It states that 150,000 affordable homes will be built – many of them for single people.⁶⁵

From a homelessness perspective, the main problem with the plan is that it emphasises home ownership as the Government's tenure of choice⁶⁶. Indeed, the plan explicitly states that “a return to social housing is inappropriate, since home ownership is the tenure of choice”.⁶⁷ This is part of a more general Government policy of addressing the problems of affordable housing for sale. But, for many homeless and potentially homeless people, whilst ownership may be an aspiration, it is not a viable option on cost grounds.

Although by far the main message of the plan is one of home ownership, it also contains a commitment to improve access to the private rented sector through the use of empty homes.⁶⁸ In particular, it states that there are 730,000 empty properties, 300,000 of which have been empty for over 6 months (indicating they are not just empty between buying and selling). Of these, 135,000 are in areas of low demand. But 40,000 are in London, and 30,000 are in South East – so “there is real potential to bring properties back into use”.⁶⁹ The main ways in which the Government plans to do this are by increasing tax on second homes and, potentially, by giving local authorities the power to improve and to lease long term empty properties.

CONCLUSIONS

Relating To The Private Rented Sector

From a homelessness perspective, the general thrust of the two Government policies discussed above is to address the problems of homelessness by increasing access to the private rented sector. One other possibility which would also seem to fit with the general direction of Government thinking is the idea of a National Rent Deposit Scheme.

This could improve access to the private rented housing for single homeless people, since many on low incomes cannot afford to pay a deposit.⁷⁰ The main difficulty with current schemes, particularly in areas of high housing demand, is finding landlords willing to participate. If there were a statutory custodial scheme where money is deposited on behalf of a tenant, the tenant would then, in theory, be free to seek accommodation with any landlord.⁷¹

Providing a guarantee/deposit nationally also presents an opportunity to offer other key elements of support in conjunction with the guarantee. One model for such a service is the Crisis Smartmove initiative, which combines a guarantee with key elements of support, such as advice, first month's rent in advance (which must be paid back), tenancy support including befriending, and help with housing benefit claims.

Other suggestions that have been made include reform of capital gains tax, subsidies to encourage institutional investment in the sector, mechanisms to guarantee sub-market rent where there is a need for affordable housing, and encouraging Registered Social Landlords to invest in the private rented sector.⁷²

Relating to Social Housing

Increased availability of empty homes or a tenancy deposit in the private rented sector may help improve access, but can it be assumed that it will do enough to address the full scale of the problems of suitable housing for single homeless people?

A quick examination of the figures suggests that there are reasons to be doubtful. There are now almost 250,000 fewer homes for rent that are owned by local authorities and Registered Social Landlords than there were in 1997. So, an increase of 250,000 private rented homes would be needed just to bring the total volume of rented accommodation back to the 1997 levels. In other words, nearly all of the properties that have been empty for more than 6 months would need to be brought into the private rented market just to bring the total amount of rented accommodation back to the 1997 levels. And this assumes that all the currently empty homes are in geographic areas where there would be a demand for them and that the longstanding trend of a declining social housing stock ceases. Furthermore, demographic trends (such as a continuing increase in the total number of households, as one-person households become more common) imply that there is actually a need for additional rented homes each year, with the Barker review recently estimating that this additional need is around an additional 17,000 rented homes each year.

So, is improving access to the private sector the answer to homelessness? Or is it actually a response to the fact that Government has turned its back on social housing, so the private sector has *had* to become the answer?

We conclude that ***the Government should review its existing suite of policies from the specific perspective of homelessness, either to demonstrate how they will be sufficient to address the problems of the shortage of suitable housing for homeless people or to complement existing policies with some additional initiatives relating to the supply of suitable social housing.*** Such a review would complement the recent Barker review by focussing on the particular needs of one group of the population, namely homeless people.

9. HEALTH

LINKS WITH HOMELESSNESS

Within the single homelessness population, rough sleepers are clearly at high risk of poor health, but research has shown that all single homeless people have, on average, worse health than the population as a whole.⁷³ They are more likely to suffer from mental health problems and alcohol and drug misuse.⁷⁴ They are also at greater risk of physical illness and or contracting infectious diseases. Access to appropriate health care is therefore of paramount concern.

CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY

The NHS Plan states that the socially excluded, including the homeless, require targeted intervention to reduce health inequalities. Three of the main policies affecting the way that health services are delivered on the frontline which may help to achieve this are:

- The Personalised Medical Services (PMS).
- The National Enhanced Service for Homeless People (NES).
- The Alternative Provider Medical Services (APMS).

Personalised Medical Services (PMS)

The PMS is a locally agreed contract between GPs and their local Primary Care Trust to provide a service to a particular group of people in their area. The agreement is based on the levels of resource appropriate to the work they do and the services delivered rather than based on the number of patients on their list. In 2003, around two-fifths of GPs were in some sort of a PMS contract. It is not known how many of those provide a service for homelessness people.

One issue that arises is consistency of provision - whether or not an area has adequate services that meet the needs of homeless people will depend on whether a GP in that area has decided that health among the homeless population is an issue, and decides to arrange a contract with the PCT on that basis. The shape of the resulting service will also depend on the approach of that GP, with the possibilities ranging from a basic service to a comprehensive service, and including outreach or requiring the patients to come to the surgery by appointment.

National Enhanced Service for Homeless People (NES)

The NES is one of three types of contract available to GPs under the new General Medical Services (GMS) contract introduced in April 2004. It is a specialised service provided according to specific guidelines drawn up to help disadvantaged groups (one of which is homeless people). Thus it is similar to a PMS but, unlike the PMS, the GP remains in a GMS contract.

The Department of Health has produced comprehensive guidelines regarding the possible use of the NES to provide services for homeless people.

As with the PMS for homeless people, consistency of provision is an issue. In particular, NES contracts are only permitted only where there is a 'critical mass' of patients, and therefore homeless people in 'non-critical mass' areas will not have the possibility of such a service.

The Alternative Provider Medical Services (APMS)

The APMS basically enables a company (e.g. Boots) or a charity (e.g. Crisis) to go to a Primary Care Trust and request money to employ a GP or health care professional to deliver a particular type of service. This means that, unlike the PMS or NES policies, both the initiative and the focus and shape of the consequent services lie with the voluntary or private sector provider. It is hoped that this policy will revolutionise health care for the hard to reach but, clearly, this depends on how the specialist service providers react.

CONCLUSIONS

All three of the policies above appear to represent major opportunities for homeless people. The issue is whether, in practice, they are fulfilling this opportunity on the ground. In particular, all three require a local health provider (GP, Primary Care Trust or specialist provider) to take the initiative, in terms of both the shape and - indeed - the very existence of the services to be provided. If no local health provider takes the initiative in a particular geographic area, then there will be no health services specifically focussed on the homeless in that area.

Locally, it is the Primary Care Trust which is ultimately responsible for ensuring that local health needs are met. Nationally, it is the duty of the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection (CHAI) to ensure that all Primary Care Trusts are providing services to the necessary standard. In neither case, however, are there any specific arrangements in place to ensure that these responsibilities specifically cover the subject of homeless people.

In summary, therefore, current arrangements allow for – and indeed, encourage – the development of health services to meet the needs of homeless people. But currently these arrangements guarantee neither the volume nor the quality of such provision.

In this context, we have two suggestions. First, in their questioning of Primary Care Trusts, *CHAI should include a questions along the lines of “what are you doing about the health needs of homeless people in your area?”*. This would both help to raise awareness of the issue among Primary Care Trusts and provide a basis for mapping current provision and thus identifying gaps.

Second, *the major national voluntary organisations working with the homeless should put together some authoritative material on the health needs of the homeless and how these best be met, for circulation to all Primary Care Trusts*. One particular subject that this material should cover is treatment for drug misuse among homeless people – should such services simply be part of the mainstream drug treatment services or is something additional (such as outreach services) required? Again, the aim would be to raise the awareness of Primary Care Trusts about the health needs of homeless people.

Finally, the new APMS initiative provides an additional opportunity, namely for voluntary organisations working with the homeless to take direct action to ensure that their health needs are met. We suggest that *the major national voluntary organisations working with the homeless should take a lead in this, raising awareness of the initiative amongst the voluntary sector and developing guidelines to help such organisations both initiate and run APMS schemes.*

END NOTES

¹ Local authorities have a duty to provide accommodation to those households which it accepts at being statutorily homeless and which it classifies as being 'in priority need'. These households comprise all those with dependent children plus those who do not have dependent children but who are classified as 'vulnerable'. It has no such duty for those households which it accepts at being statutorily homeless but which it classifies as not being 'in priority need'. From ODPM Statistical Releases: around 68,000 households without dependent children were accepted by their local authority as being statutorily homeless and were classified as being in priority need in 2003, compared to an estimated 70,000 who were classified as not being in priority need.

² ODPM Statistical Releases.

³ Social Trends 34, Table 2.2.

⁴ Social Trends 34, Table 10.4.

⁵ Social Trends 34, Table 10.5.

⁶ Social Trends 34, Table 10.21.

⁷ Homeless Bulletins, ODPM; Statistical Bulletin Housing Series, Scottish Executive; Welsh Housing Office Statistics.

⁸ Social Trends 34, Table 2.9.

⁹ Households Below Average Income, 2002/03, DWP.

¹⁰ From the 2001/02 CORE database of people in support housing.

¹¹ 'Survey of homeless households living in temporary accommodation'. Report of preliminary findings and implications for policy and the 2004 Spending Review, Shelter, 2004.

¹² See, for example:

'Pathways through homelessness: a review of the research evidence', Scottish Homelessness Task Force 2000 (Anderson and Tulloch); 'Improving employment options for Homeless People', Homelessness Directorate, 2003; 'A future foretold: new approaches to meeting the long-term needs of single homeless people', Lemos, 1999.

¹³ 'More than a roof: a report into tackling homelessness', Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2002.

¹⁴ Off the Streets and into Work (OSW). Interim results published in a press release in January 2004. Full results are due to be published in November 2004.

¹⁵ Off the Streets and into Work (OSW). Interim results published in a press release in January 2004. Full results are due to be published in November 2004.

¹⁶ 'Single homeless people in London: profiles of service users and perceptions of needs', Crane and Warnes, Sheffield Institute for Studies on Ageing, 2001. This survey questions staff about services provided to single homeless people. One question asks whether there are particular difficulties "with obtaining employment and skills training for a client group aged 40 years or more". Over 32% responded 'don't know'. Of all questions asked, this was by a long way the question which received the highest frequency of 'don't knows' in response. The authors suggest that this is perhaps because the need for such a service is not given adequate consideration.

¹⁷ The Labour Party's public consultation strategy launched in December 2003.

¹⁸ *Households below average income*, 2002/03, DWP, 2003. The statements in the text refer to the numbers below 60% of median household income after deducting housing costs – one of the main low income thresholds that the Government itself is currently using to monitor progress on its poverty targets.

¹⁹ Inland Revenue, 2004.

²⁰ According to the National Inquiry into Youth Homelessness in 1996, 250,000 people aged 16-24 became homeless. Official statistics show that 25% of homeless applicants are under 25, whilst this age group represents only 17% of the population.

²¹ Previous schemes, such as the Working Families Tax Credit, excluded those without dependent children.

²² The data currently available on low pay is severely restricted and is currently limited to the numbers of people aged 18-21 and 22 to retirement. No data on the characteristics of these people are available and no more detailed age breakdowns (e.g. those aged 22 to 25) are available.

²³ Level Two is GCSE level, or “employment” level.

²⁴ See Crisis Factsheet 2002; Centrepoint Factsheet 2002.

²⁵ ‘The 16 hour rule – past its sell by date’, Foyer Federation, 2003. Centrepoint’s ‘Youth homelessness statistics’ estimate that 40% of their clients have no qualifications. ‘Off to a bad start’, a report by the Mental Health Foundation, 1996, estimates that 60% have no qualifications.

²⁶ ‘Working together: Connexions and youth homelessness agencies’, Connexions and Department for Transport and the Regions, 2001.

²⁷ ‘Working together: Connexions and youth homelessness agencies’, Connexions and Department for Transport and the Regions, 2001.

²⁸ ‘Skills for life - the national strategy for improving adult literacy and numeracy’, Department for Education and Skills, 2001

²⁹ Learn Direct carried out pilots in 2004 with The Foyer Federation with the aim of producing a national model for Foyers.

³⁰ Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities, pp 83-86.

³¹ Learning Zones aimed to engage rough sleepers and former rough sleepers in training and development skills, build confidence and improve social networks with a view to future employment and enhanced tenancy sustainment.

³² In 2001/02, almost 50% of care leavers had no qualifications at all. For more details, see ‘A better education for children in care’, Social Exclusion Unit, 2003.

³³ ‘Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care’ Joint Department of Health and Department for education and Skills, 2000.

³⁴ ‘More than a roof: a report into tackling homelessness’, Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2002.

³⁵ Homelessness Act 2002.

³⁶ Homelessness Act 2002.

³⁷ ‘More than a roof: a report into tackling homelessness’, Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2002.

³⁸ The way in which the HSHD does this is to allocate funding on the basis of applications from authorities, so long as those applications fit with the homelessness strategy of that local authority, and therefore, by extension, so long as it deals with homelessness prevention. In 2003, it had a budget of £70 million to distribute between authorities. Prevention was one of three key areas to which funding would be prioritised.

³⁹ ‘Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities’, ODPM and Department of Health, 2002

⁴⁰ ‘Evaluation of initiatives to prevent youth homelessness’, Greater London Authority, 2003.

⁴¹ BMRB Social Research on behalf of Department for Education and Skills, October 2003.

⁴² See, for example, ‘Scottish National Standards and Good Practice for Housing Information Services’, Scottish Homes, 2000.

⁴³ ‘Reforming housing benefit for private tenants and tax credit recipients’, Kemp and Wilcox, April 2002.

- ⁴⁴ ‘Private renting: a new settlement’, Shelter and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002 states that: “housing benefit significantly undercuts rent levels, and as a result many landlords have withdrawn from the claimant market altogether. The result is to exclude households on housing benefit from reasonable accommodation in the sector, especially in areas of high demand for housing”.
- ⁴⁵ ‘Reforming housing benefit for private tenants and tax credit recipients’, Kemp and Wilcox, April 2002.
- ⁴⁶ The Pivot Initiative, 2001.
- ⁴⁷ The Pivot Initiative, 2001.
- ⁴⁸ ‘Private renting: a new settlement’, Shelter and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002.
- ⁴⁹ ‘The 16 hour rule – past its sell by date’, Foyer Federation, 2003.
- ⁵⁰ Chartered Institute of Housing: Evidence to the Social Security Commission Inquiry on Housing Benefit Reform, February 2000.
- ⁵¹ Chartered Institute of Housing: Evidence to the Social Security Commission Inquiry on Housing Benefit Reform, February 2000.
- ⁵² See, for example, ‘Building choice and responsibility: a radical agenda for Housing Benefit’, October 2002
- ⁵³ The Labour Party’s public consultation strategy launched in December 2003.
- ⁵⁴ Figures attributed to Shelter in Chartered Institute of Housing: Evidence to the Social Security Commission Inquiry on Housing Benefit Reform, February 2000.
- ⁵⁵ The Pivot Initiative, 2001
- ⁵⁶ Camden, for example, pay around 35% of their Housing Benefit claimants paid entirely in advance, 23% paid two weeks in arrears, and 42% paid four weeks in arrears.
- ⁵⁷ ‘More hope for Housing Benefit’, The Pivot Initiative 2003.
- ⁵⁸ ‘The 16 hour rule – past its sell by date’, Foyer Federation, 2003.
- ⁵⁹ Housing Investment Programme Returns 1997-2003.
- ⁶⁰ Response to the Barker Review, Shelter 2003
- ⁶¹ Centrepoint Agenda, 2001, and Response to the Barker Review, Shelter 2003.
- ⁶² There is a third housing policy document –the PPG3 –the primary aim of which is to improve speed of building and conversions on brownfield sites. It has been omitted from the discussion because, whilst the overall impact may increase housing, it has no obvious specific impact on homeless people.
- ⁶³ New powers will be given to the Housing Corporation, which will allow them to work with bodies other than RSLs. This aims to improve competition, improve value for money, and therefore increase the supply of affordable homes.
- ⁶⁴ These areas are Thames Gateway, London-Cambridge corridor, Ashford and Milton Keynes.
- ⁶⁵ ‘Sustainable communities: building for the future’, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003.
- ⁶⁶ This, it says, is a response to the fact that it is the public’s tenure of choice. This raises a separate issue of whether government should subsidise preference.
- ⁶⁷ ‘Sustainable communities: building for the future’, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003.
- ⁶⁸ ‘Sustainable communities: building for the future’, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003.
- ⁶⁹ ‘Sustainable communities: building for the future’, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003.
- ⁷⁰ The National Rent Deposit Forum’s Statistical Report 2002 states that “most clients seen were single, young and male”.

⁷¹ At present, some get help from voluntary or local authority schemes (rent deposit schemes or deposit guarantee schemes) which either pay the money on the tenant's behalf or provide a guarantee to the landlord that the money will be available should the landlord have a legitimate claim to it at the end of the tenancy.

⁷² 'Private renting: a new settlement', Shelter and Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002.

⁷³ The last comprehensive comparison of health of single homeless people compared to the general population was 'Health of Single Homeless People', Centre for Housing Policy, Bines, 1994. However, many subsequent projects have reinforced the link between poor housing/homelessness and poor health, among them: 'A Future Foretold: New Approaches to Meeting the Long-term Needs of Single Homeless People', Lemos, 1999; 'Healthy Hostels: A guide to promoting health and well-being among homeless people', Health Action for Homeless People and Crisis, 2001; 'Critical Condition', Crisis; 'Pathways Through Homelessness: A Review of the Research Evidence' Scottish Homelessness Task Force 2000 (Anderson and Tulloch); 'Health and Homelessness in London: a Review', King's Fund, Pleace and Quilgars, 1996.

⁷⁴ For example, according to the Drug Services for Homeless People handbook, one in three single homeless people have at some point been problematic drug users.